A Talk on

"ELIXIR OF LIFE"

by

Hon. Justice N. Chandrasekhara Aiyar
Judge, Supreme Court of India.

at the

Coimbatore Rotary Club

GOPAL BAGH July 24, 1952 **COIMBATORE**

M-297

A Talk on

"ELIXIR OF LIFE"

by

Hon. Justice N. Chandrasekhara Aiyar

at 5-30 p. m. on Thursday, 24-7-52

at Gopal Bagh,

at the

Coimbatore Rotary Club

Mr. President and Friends,

I must first of all express to all of you my deep gratitude for having called me here this evening. The gratitude is enhanced by the fact that you have chosen to think of a non-rotarian to address you this evening. The rotary organization is a world-wide one and just for the sake of informing myself about its activities and as to when it was first started, I asked your secretary to be good enough to give me some literature about it. He gave me this pamphlet. I also looked into the concise Oxford dictionary and there found a fairly compendious but good description of the Rotary. It said that it is a world-wide society for international service, and that it got its name from clubs which entertain in rotation.

I was particularly happy when I found that, among the ideals that it has got before itself, almost the first one is the ideal of service to humanity, service to fellowmen. The second item in the

programme of the Rotary which struck me as well worth attention is this statement. "Rotary seeks all that which brings people together and it avoids all which separates them." Then the third which caught my eye was "Rotary expects every member to be faithful to his religion and loyal in his citizenship." If these high ideals inspire the Rotary clubs all over the world, then there can be no doubt about the fact that we are living in an age of progress and can look forward hopefully to the future of humanity and the world. The ideals, that are found in the programme, are, when analysed really, ideals of love, brotherhood, tolerance and loyalty to the State. Can there be a combination of higher ideals which any individual among us can keep before himself or which any organization which we may form can have before itself as a goal to be reached?

You may ask me, it is all well and good for you to have spoken of the ideals of the Rotary, those ideals are there in cold print; we have got them before our eyes day in and day out, and whenever we meet every week or every two weeks or every month, we remind ourselves of these ideals and try to follow them: but what connection is there between those ideals and the subject chosen for this evening's talk? It was not with any great deliberation that I chose that subject. It came to me on the spur of the moment as your secretaries will tell you. And I have been hard put to it to think as to what I should say this evening before an audience like this consisting of business men, professional men and a regular galaxy of judicial talent.

My theme this night will be to place before you one or two considerations that might be useful in the work that lies before us and in the work that we are doing every day, not only in connection with any business or profession that we may carry on but as relating to our contacts with the outer life around us. I want if possible to indicate to you the need or the importance of the idle life. It might be that you might think it is a paradox I am indulging in or that I am consciously going to be guilty of any sophistical argument. But I do want you to believe me when I say that I am serious. We are now hemmed in on all sides by feverish activity, hectic speed. We do not know what we are after. We do not know in which direction we are going. We do not know what is the ultimate purpose or the aim of life. This age which has been called the mechanist age or the machine age, instead of producing the result of making more men free to think for themselves, more men free to think about what is good for the world, has unfortunately produced, by a combination of circumstances or factors over which we have no control largely, but over some of which we have control, a result which drives us like machines. We are ceasing to be human beings. We are getting more and more to be like automatons. We work efficiently, and punctually, perhaps; but still there is something that is wanting in our lives which makes us all rather discontented, worried and restless. What is it that is absent in the lives of most of us which, if it exists, would make for a large amount of contentment and happiness? I would say that we have lost the art of living.

The art of living consists in combining well-ordered activity with well-used rest. When I used the word "idle", I did not mean lazy. I meant that capacity to contrive your life in such a way that you will be able to snatch moments, if not hours, of leisure for yourself, when you can think, when you can turn the search-light inwards to find out what is wrong with you and discover what is wrong with the world around you, so that, if it is possible, you can order things in such a manner that you may yourself progress consistently with the progress of the neighbours in whose midst you live. We are all frightfully busy, hastening, hurrying, running hither and thither without aim or purpose. The competitive and over-civilized life leaves little or no room for thought or reflection.

As I told you, idleness in my connotation does not mean laziness. Idleness means leisure and as many of you know, leisure generates culture and culture in its turn produces all those qualities which make a gentleman of a man, those qualities which endear him to those in whose midst his life is cast. Culture is not necessarily education. Education, as understood ordinarily, means the cramming of a large number of facts and events into one's memory and erudition is vastness of education. Culture, however, means a taste, and a discernment according to which you judge of things, which enables us to have a proper sense of values, a true sense of proportion. Culture makes for sweetness and light. It is this culture which even illiterates among us possess. They are not educated but they are cultured, which means that instinctively,

intuitively, and also by training, you have a certain frame of mind where you are sweet to those around you, helpful to everyone of them, you love your neighbours, you want to be serviceable to them to the extent to which it lies in your power.

Now if we want this culture, we must have leisure to cultivate that culture. If you have no leisure, if you are going about in desperate hurry to make both ends meet, – and with several of us it is a problem to make both ends meet – and in that hurry, if you lose sight of the things that are really valuable, you lose half the zest and joy of life. And when you lose that zest and that joy, and when you feel driven from pillar to post for snatching at this, or grasping the other thing, in the pursuit of material possessions and power, you are really not living properly. The business of living is quite different from the art of living. The art of living is what I want to place before you; and in this art, a great measure of idleness, a great measure of leisure is very essential if you are to experience the joy of life and I would go further and say, if you are to be a true Rotarian.

The return to the life simple, the return to the life grand, not by reason of the gorgeousness of all the complexities of modern civilization but grand because of its very simplicity, with few wants and with a pervasive detachment, is indeed a a difficult process. We have become over-sophisticated. An unsophisticated rural or village life had its own drawbacks but it had its own

virtues We have got into a life of urban sophistication multiplying our comforts and necessities to such an extent that it has become impossible for us to think of ourselves without them. They have become the *sine qua nons* of our existence. If we are thrown into the village by some accident, and happen to be there for a couple of days or more, how we pant for the newspaper, the cinema, and the radio! All these have become part and parcel of our daily existence to such an extent that it is impossible for us even to imagine we can live without them. I am not against the news-papers, or against radios, or any such amenities. Let us have as many of them as possible, if we can afford them. But even those who can't afford them, even those who can manage without them, for the sake of vanity, for the sake of pride, for the sake of conformity, for the sake of convention, desire all these things and when frustrated, they begin to complain that fortune has not been in their favour, that a compeer of theirs is prosperous, while they are down on luck.

Now let us, particularly in all moments of depression, get to know what is our purpose in life, what should be the aim of our lives and how best we can manage to be happy and contented and make others happy and contented as well. The haves and the have-nots is a classification which you all know. The haves among us suffer from want of work. The have-nots suffer from overwork. This is a very lopsided state of affairs. It must be remedied as quickly as possible. And how is that to be remedied? While you are trying to raise the

standard of the have-nots, the haves must also be prepared to return, at least sometimes, if not always, not compelled to do so but with their own free volition, to the unsophisticated simple way of life where thoughts are much more important than mere conveniences or comforts and where we derive pleasure, not from our surroundings but from the way in which the mind is serene and happy and contented. Now, this aspect is a very important one which all of us have to remember-especially those in callings which involve a great amount of strain and work. We must be able to manage to retire within ourselves, to be happy when we are lonely, to feel bored when we are in company and thus attune ourselves to a simple way of life, a life of leisure and culture, truly sweet, loving and helpful.

It is therefore that I have made bold to plead before you for idleness. You must be prepared to loaf about, loaf about often, go out without any definite purpose, but to think calmly and maturely of the joys which are your own, whether luxuries may or may not be yours. This art of loafing is what one philosopher called the cult of vagabondage. It is a cult to which we may, in fact, should devote attention.

A Tamil saint—I think it is Thayumanavar–said, "சும்மாயிருப்பதரிதோ"; it is difficult to remain quiet. There is much in this philosophy of quietism. The quietness is the quietness of the body and the mind - a serene tranquillity. It is very rare to find people who are quiet in this sense. He did not

mean the lazy lot who sit on the verandahs of their houses doing nothing whatever usefully. He meant those who employ their minds for the acquisition of culture, for observation, and for contemplation.

The busy man, as some Greek philosopher observed, is rarely a wise man; and the wise man is rarely a busy man. If we understand it literally, it may mean a reflection against the busy man but what is meant is something different. It means that a very busy man has no time to become wise, no time to gather experience, no time to think for himself, no time to look inside himself and ponder over things as to what should be done and should not be. The wise man is rarely over-busy. He often manages to get time to think for himself. That is an aspect of our daily life that I should like to place before all of you, particularly this evening, because I know I am in the midst of business men who are living in an age of acute competition. The stress of life must be terrific for them but even they might make an attempt in this direction of contriving to secure leisure so that they can help themselves and help others as well.

The elixir of life, therefore, that I want to place before you as one that is worth looking at, even if you don't swallow it, is a combination – not a mechanical mixture but a chemical compound – of well-directed, and well-regulated activity with a well-devoted leisure This harmonious blend of activity and leisure going hand in hand, activity for the advancement of ourselves and of those around us, and leisure for thought and culture is what is

necessary in my humble view for the proper life. It is the middle way, the middle way which was favoured by the Lord Buddha, the middle way which is spoken of in the Gita and other great gospels of the world. The art of living consists in this balance.

If you are idle all the time, you are a useless unit of society. You might be thrown back and relegated to the back shelves. But if you are feverishly active all the time, you might lose your usefulness very quickly. Therefore, this union of characteristics is what I mean by the elixir of life and if you strive to take this elixir and taste it from time to time, in small doses or large doses as it comes your way, I am sure that we shall all be contributing to a peaceful world, to a happy world, to a contented world and that the future of the Rotarian organization will be assured by the increasing fulfilment of its great ideals.

I wish all of you friends good luck. I trust all of you will endeavour your best to realise the objects that you have set before yourself by becoming members of this institution. Please excuse me gentlemen, if what I have said may be trite or trifling. I merely wanted to place before you some of my ideas and if some of you are stimulated into thinking in the direction suggested, I shall feel amply rewarded for having come over here this evening.

Thank you. (Cheers).

U—39—72

U. M. S. Power Press, Avanashi Road, Coimbatore